



Use of AI and Technology in Fashion Events during Covid-19

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Abstract

Celebrities and models walking down the ramp, paparazzi snapping every second of the grandeur showcase have always been hallmarks of Indian fashion weeks. Due to COVID19 the whole scenario has changed. The fashion calendar's future is unknown. With a global health pandemic, an economic depression, and a global social justice movement, designers and their teams face new challenges every day.

Sanitisation, Social Distancing, Masks, Temperature Check, and closed doors are the new normal for fashion industry as well. Because the audience is now seated in their living rooms, they can see the magic up close and from vantage points.

The study explores the future and growth of online fashion events in India during COVID19, pros and cons of online events, use of technology and its financial implications on fashion industry.

The study will be an exploratory study. The researchers will present case study of virtual fashion events conducted during pandemic for the purpose of the study. The research approach will be qualitative. The

researchers will also conduct in-depth interviews of fashion designers and experts of fashion industry events.

Keywords: Events, Virtual, Fashion Shows, COVID19

1. Introduction

Celebrities and models walking down the ramp, paparazzi snapping every second of the grandeur showcase have always been hallmarks of Indian fashion weeks. Due to COVID19 the whole scenario has changed. The fashion calendar's future is unknown. The fashion designers have faced new challenges every day during this global health pandemic followed by an economic depression.

Sanitisation, Social Distancing, Masks, Temperature Check, and closed doors are the new normal for the fashion industry as well. The viewers are now watching shows live from their living rooms, they can feel and experience the magic up and close.

Fashion Industry faced a tough year in 2020. During the coronavirus outbreak, over three-quarters of publicly traded corporations lost money. Consumer habits changed, supply lines were disrupted, and diseases spread throughout numerous countries.

“Due to the outbreak, people crowded in their homes, travel was restricted, and stores closed globally. Companies must provide more engaging social experiences in 2021 to engage consumers..... In an industry where in-person connection and long-distance travel have traditionally been of paramount importance, fashion companies have demonstrated resilience from the beginning of the crisis by transferring their traditional ways of working to the online environment. Social distancing measures and the inability to travel have accelerated the shift to digital in design, product creation, buying, selling, and other domains.” de Bogotá, C. D. C. (2021).

Virtual samples, digital material libraries, and 3D representations of collections for sales, which were not commonly used before to the outbreak, are now being more widely used.

In such a scenario Online Fashion Events can be utilised as a saviour. The business can keep going, cost effective, more engaging and more audience. There is innovation and creativity in virtual events. By taking advantage of the virtual format, designers can interact with the audience, even if they are located

in different parts of the world. There is no doubt in saying that a virtual fashion show attracts more viewers than an in-person one.

India is a big and growing market with approximately “460 million internet users in India, 60% of whom are actively engaged on social media websites” and factors such as digital India and low data prices, the country is experiencing an upsurge in online and internet usage.

“Until now, the Indian fashion fraternity has put up three virtual fashion shows — India Couture Week, The Blender’s Pride Fashion Tour and the recently-concluded Lakme Fashion Week — with each of them enthraling the audiences from across the country and abroad.” Dutta, S. (2020, October 26).

Research Objectives:

- To explore innovative ways of conducting virtual fashion events
- To discover Pros and Cons of Online Fashion events
- To study financial implications of conducting virtual fashion events

2. Review of Literature

In 2017, New York Fashion Week went digital and expanded beyond America. The guests can digitally attend Milan's "Dreaming of Italy" event. The show was shot in Milan a week prior. The organisers used Samsung VR headsets to create a realistic virtual reality experience for New York fashion lovers. The companies that participated in the show were able to bring their New York clientele to Milan. Visitors might engage with the merchandise by viewing them in 360°. Anyone watching the virtual reality fashion show felt as if they were in a luxuriously decorated room with gorgeous models in front of them.

Those who were unable to attend the fashion show due to a variety of circumstances might use virtual reality to catch up. Live performances are being recorded in 360 degrees and turned into VR applications by brands. Thousands of users can now get a front-row seat to the collections. Streaming is already being used by many businesses to expand their customer base. Balenciaga, for example, offered a free smartphone app with Google Cardboard VR in 2016.

“Participation in fashion shows has long been associated with hierarchical relational positions in the sphere of luxury fashion consumption, with VIP attendees enjoying exclusivity and status perks.” (Entwistle & Rocamora, 2006, Fionda & Moore, 2009; Burns, Hutchins, & Mathisen, 2019)

Jung, J., Yu, J., Seo, Y., & Ko, E. (2021) “Virtual fashion shows have evolved as a fresh kind of VR marketing communications in the fashion industry, in which customers can watch a pre-recorded catwalk show on their own VR devices. Several premium fashion firms, including Louis Vuitton and ELLE, have adopted it to take advantage of VR's new technological capabilities in marketing communications.”

“Virtual fashion shows might be a levelling field for e-commerce companies and up-and-coming designers who can't afford to put on traditional fashion displays. Because fashion shows are aspirational events, they provide an opportunity for all designers to access a previously closed platform.” Nast C, 2020

Virtual concerts also serve a broader significance considering the ongoing health crisis. There are no physical interactions between the designer, models, stylists, viewers, or customers in these exhibitions. As a result, they can be created and shown with all interactions taking place entirely online, removing any constraints on movement or concerns about hygiene.

“The reinvention of trade fairs and showrooms predicted in our "Unconventional Conventions" article last year took off faster than expected, as evidenced by the adoption of a variety of technologies such as digital trade hubs, marketplaces, and fashion displays.” de Bogotá, C. D. C. (2021).

For example, in July 2020, 220,000 individuals visited the internet edition of Colombia Moda, a prominent Latin American fashion show, where more than 4,000 digital appointments were set up.

“Firms that are losing in-store foot traffic may be encouraged to sell products directly to consumers online using artificial intelligence. Consumers may assess how items seem and fit on them, and determine which size to buy, without giving up any of the advantages of in-person shopping.” Nast C, (2020).

This protects the customer experience while bringing up additional sales channels. As for virtual photoshoots, they allow firms to generate catalogues and virtual runway presentations for a fraction of the cost.

“11th March 2020, the date for FDCI's bi-annual fashion show LMIFW A/W 2020 was postponed due to the scare of Corona Virus. Many other fashion events and exhibitions that were organized and lined up in March, April and May 2020 were cancelled due to restrictions on gatherings by the government authorities of India. Such restrains and suspicions on physical gatherings led to the encouragement of virtual exhibitions and shows.” (Are virtual shows the future of fashion in India? n.d.)

Young designers may now reach a larger audience for a fraction of the cost, dispelling the misconception that high fashion is unreachable.

3. Research Methodology:

The study is exploratory research. The researchers have presented three international case studies and two Indian Case studies of virtual fashion events conducted during the pandemic. The research approach is qualitative. The researchers have conducted in-depth interviews of fashion designers to understand their perspective on virtual fashion events.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Case 1 – Moschino

Moschino the Italian luxury fashion brand founded in 1983 grabbed all attention in 2020 during Spring/Summer Collection 2021 fashion show. Jeremy Scott, creative director of Moschino soared to inconceivable heights of virtual fashion triumph. He just produced a collection including doll-sized clothing worn by unique marionette dolls. This gifted designer built amazing dolls of the front row spectators. He also created a flawless doll representation of himself. The whole thing was imaginary. This concept was certainly a big hit, attracting the attention of all fashion influencers.

For the 40 looks, Scott made doll-sized copies of opulent dresses and gowns in fabrics like golden jacquard and pastel-hued tulle. Scott researched and took inspiration from designers in Paris had made small couture items to help revive the French fashion sector after WWII. The Théâtre de la Mode donned Nina Ricci and Balenciaga mini-designs while touring Europe and America. As is runway custom, a Scott puppet appeared at the end. (Konstantinides, 2020)



Fig 1: Glimpses of Moschino's Fashion Show in 2020

4.2 Case Study 2 - Khaite

Khaite's Catherine Holstein combines AR and video with more traditional “offline” media to create a multi-sensory experience. It was the first time when a fashion label Khaite gave the first augmented reality-infused presentation in 2018. It allowed guests to view the new season items by scanning a QR code in a special book given to their homes. The items were displayed on the phone as 3D representations as if they were literally present on their coffee table or desk. The experience resulted in a 400 percent increase in revenue for KHAITE and a four-minute increase in client engagement time.

It took a pandemic for the industry to take virtual reality, augmented reality, live-streaming, and other digital experiences professionally. In 2020 Khaite provided yet another interesting experience to the

users. The encounter is triggered by scannable images in KHAITE's zine or online. Users may label AR experiences as they scroll through the looks. Tapping an image opens an AR experience rather than a video or a library of images. This time, entire models parade over the page. An integrated commerce mechanism allows customers to purchase looks directly from the experience.

Buying high-end apparel has become even more of a luxury as more clients work from home. Users can put the virtual model in their own home using greenscreen video, helping to bridge the mental divide by showing how the clothes could fit into their own lives.

Customers can observe how the clothing move and close up the materials and textures using greenscreen video. Chandelier Creative designed a printed zine to accompany the digital experience. By scanning photographs within the physical zine, users may instantly turn 2D drawings into 3D designs. Instead of creating two different experiences, the zine and added WebAR capability provided a unique experience for a subset of people.

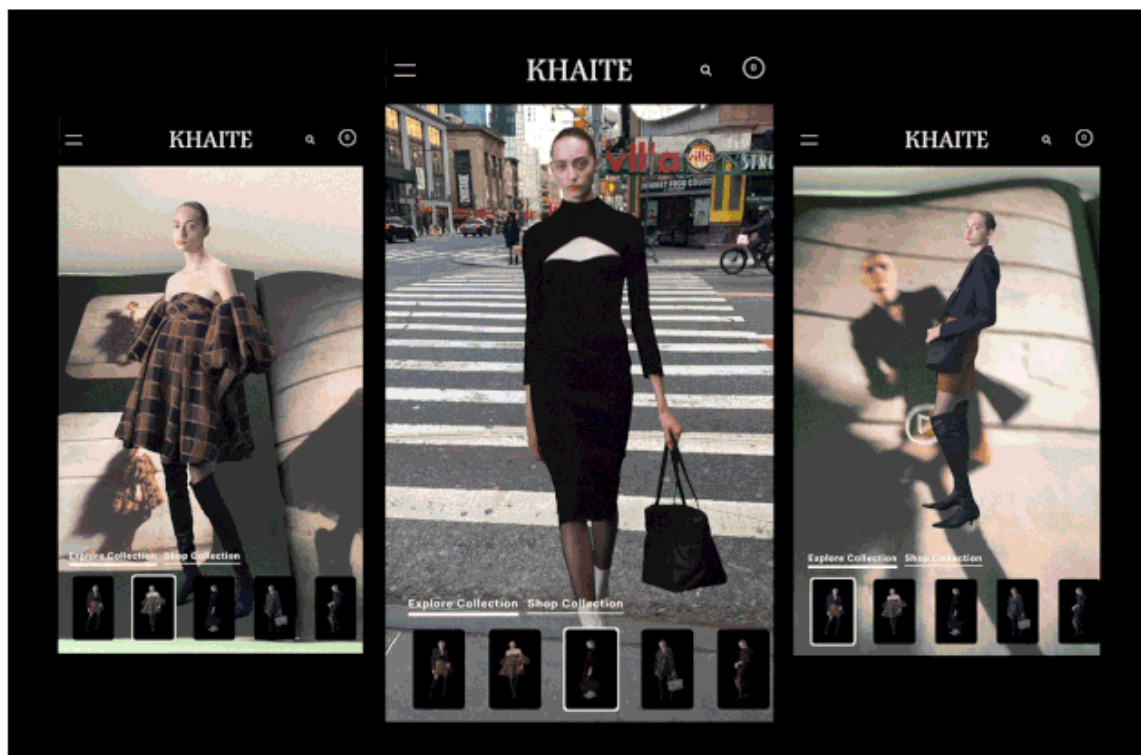


Fig 2: Khaite's AR fashion experience

4.3 Case Study – III Dolce & Gabbana

The latest Dolce & Gabbana fashion presentation made history. It's not so much the fantasy and beauty of the outfits that make the event memorable. The models are just amazing! For the first time in fashion history, four intelligent robots walked the runway. The experiment is a consequence of a collaboration between Dolce & Gabbana and the IIT in Genoa. The fashion house's exhibition, including models and robots alike, partnered with the Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia (IIT). The iCub and R1 multipurpose humanoids were used as a central art piece, controlled behind-the-scenes while looks traipsed down the runway.

The researchers “lent” the designers three iCubs (104 cm tall, 22 kg humanoid robots) and one android with artificial intelligence. After that, they changed clothes and walked back with the real models. The outcome was a futuristic fashion display, a true combination of creativity and ingenuity.



Fig 3: Dolce & Gabbana fashion presentation

4.4 Case Study – Stephin Lalan

India saw its first ever virtual fashion show in June 2020 during pandemic. The Chennai-based designer Stephin Lalan, the objective was to ‘showcase a high-fashion runway show fully from home’. Stephin, has been trained by Rehane Yavar Dhala. He launched his own label in 2018. Stephen to initiate his plan of virtual fashion show took help from pals in the fraternity. He along with designer Raji Anand and stylist Sunil Karthik put together the show.

The final ramp steps were then shot on phones. Parents, couples, and children acted as show directors and creative video makers on their own DIY runways. In less than a week, the final footage was edited and posted online on Instagram.



Fig 4: Designer Stephin Lalan's Virtual Fashion Show

4.5 Case Study V India Couture Week

India got its first virtual fashion show in September 2020 when Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) announced India Couture Week from 18-23 September in an innovative bid to adapt to the continuing epidemic. The latest couture collections from 12 designers are showcased through the medium of fashion videos. The designers attempted to compensate for the lack of an "up-close and personal" element in the films by presenting as much detail as they could in the real world to experience a couture collection. The digital sets were used by designers to add innovative look.

The event was live streamed on the official FDCI website and official social media handles.

Designers have been putting up 10-12-minute-long videos over the previous four weeks, which have been shot in a variety of locales. FDCI's 15,000 sq ft office, which was transformed into a mini showing area complete with fashion week-ready backdrops, lighting, backstage, and other amenities, was offered to

the designers as an alternative location for their shoot. Designers spent from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 40 lakh, with custom venues resulted in significant cost increases.



Fig 5: India's first virtual fashion show by FDCI

4.4 In-depth Interviews Analysis

The researcher conducted in-depth interview of Indian fashion designers to understand their views on the following parameters:

1. Fashion Industry response to COVID-19

- Fashion Industry has responded to the crises in ethical way
- Tremendous changes as the industry have gone digital
- Technology has played a paramount role
- Focussing on sustainable fashion instead of fast-moving fashion now focussing on season less collection
- Environment friendly, reusing, reinventing, recreating, zero wastage

2. Challenges faced by Fashion Designers

- Requires huge amount of investment
- Consumers save on traveling cost and ticketing cost
- Fashion designers incurs expense on Photographers, Videographers, music, lighting etc
- The feel and experience are not same
- But this will be the future of fashion industry

3. How to increase audience engagement during virtual fashion events?

- This is challenging task
- Use of CGI, 3D designs, body mapping, and image capture technology are being used to cater to audience needs
- The effect is not same, but that's one alternative industry has opted for
- The future will depend on this, and blended mode will continue

4. What about the revenue and finances involved in the Virtual Fashion events?

- Virtual Fashion Shows are costly affair for designers
- Difficult to find sponsors for the shows
- Tough time for newcomers and middle level designers

5. How do artisans and weavers respond to COVID-19? Do you plan something to do upbring their work in your future collections?

- Worst hit in the pandemic
- Fashion Designers are facing tough time in supporting artisans and weavers
- As a community we should promote handwoven, hand spun fabric
- It is consumer's responsibility also to support the sector
- Promote Make in India

6. Designer point of view on Virtual Events

- It saves some amount of money for the people who come in terms of food, seating and yet the display or the new collection hype is created amongst all
- People who can't come and attend can also experience with others at the ease of sitting home or at workplace
- When u see something in person, it's more impactful and drives you powerfully towards the product in terms of buying or getting inspired
- Designers get real reviews while in person or some changes which can be better from the commercial point of view and hence can drive sales
- Buyers can see and appreciate but if need to book orders they would want to see the product before booking in bulk

5. Conclusions

Fashion shows are popular among fashion fans for showcasing meticulous designs curated by creative designers. Due of the covid-19 outbreak, all live fashion presentations had to be cancelled. This left the world not just disheartened but also befuddled.

In such a scenario virtual event was the only option left with the designers. In short span organisers teamed up with talented event planners to create the best virtual event platform.

Virtual fashion events are not a new idea as a virtual catwalk was introduced by Top Shop in 2014. In which winners sat virtually close to celebrities while wearing virtual headphones and headsets. For the first time in India, Lakme Fashion Week introduced virtual seats in 2017, allowing people who couldn't make it to the show to digitally sit first row.

During pandemic FDCI hosted India's first virtual fashion week in September 2020. 12 designers presented their latest couture collections as fashion films. But India has still long way to go. Indian Designers have to struggle for resources as virtual fashion events are expensive. The industry is yet to get tech savvy event planners as compared to western countries. The fashion shows held in India were mostly shot and live streamed with models. On the other hand, international designers experimented with robots and puppets.

While the world recognises the significance of virtual fashion events, India has yet to fully embrace them. Factors like digital India and inexpensive data pricing are promoting a wave of online and internet usage across the country.

While Instagram, Facebook, and other social media platforms make everything available from any location, virtual fashion shows and events allow fashion corporations and designers to communicate with clients without having to be physically present at the event or on the runway.

Professionals are required to focus on ensuring that digital channels generate value to the bottom line due to budget constraints and the requirement for productivity and efficiency.

The experts believe that although the virtual fashion events are good alternative, and it caters to more viewers, but they are not exactly cost effective. The huge investment is required in videography, photography, editing etc. In addition to this industry needs more techno smart professionals.

Undoubtedly, the industry has faced loses in all sectors and concern is also for the small artisans and weavers. They also need boost, and it is suggested that one should focus on handloom and handcrafted fashion. The sustainable fashion is the key word. The fashion industry has to focus on zero wastage, reuse and recycle.

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